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Letter dated 19 July 2006 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation concerning the decision of the Parliament of Georgia on peacekeeping forces in conflict zones (see annex).

I would be grateful if you could arrange for this letter and its annex to be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Vitaly **Churkin**

06-43779 (E) 240706 240706

Annex to the letter dated 19 July 2006 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation concerning the decision of the Parliament of Georgia on peacekeeping forces in conflict zones

On 18 July 2006, the Parliament of Georgia adopted a decision on peacekeeping forces in conflict zones which obligates the Government to initiate steps to end peacekeeping operations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as soon as possible, terminate the relevant agreements and arrangements and bring about the immediate withdrawal from Georgia of Russian peacekeeping contingents that are stationed there fully in accordance with international agreements currently in force. The decision provides for commencement of a process to change peacekeeping arrangements and deploy international police forces in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

During the discussion of the draft decision, some deputies went so far as to say that, unless those conditions were accepted, the Russian peacekeepers would be declared unlawful and treated as occupying forces. The decision falsely claims that the actions of the Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia and South Ossetia present one of the main obstacles to peaceful settlement of the conflicts.

The Russian Federation regards the decision as a provocative step designed to aggravate tension, destroy the existing format of negotiations and shatter the framework of legal agreements for the peaceful settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts. The accusations that the decision makes against the Russian Federation constitute a disgraceful attempt to shift the blame to others.

We consider that the language of ultimatums that Georgia is using with respect to Russian peacekeepers is counterproductive. Unilateral decisions cannot be allowed to lead to abrogation of the relevant international agreements. Our position remains unchanged: the adoption of parliamentary decisions on the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers can only entail a fresh crisis and a humanitarian catastrophe. In recent years, Russia, in cooperation with foreign partners and international organizations, has exerted considerable efforts to maintain a fragile balance that has now been shattered by the bellicose rhetoric of Georgian politicians and their attempts to use provocation and military force to resolve the problems of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It is only through existing peacekeeping mechanisms that it has been possible to keep the situation under control.

It should not be forgotten that the format of the negotiation process, which, besides the Russian Federation, involves the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the member States of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia, was agreed upon by all parties to the conflicts. The irresponsible actions of Tbilisi are capable of ruling out any possibility of peaceful settlement of the conflicts.

The Russian Federation will take such measures as are necessary to ensure compliance with existing international agreements, prevent the destabilization of the situation in the region and protect the rights and interests of Russian citizens living there.